

II. CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A secure postage metering device having a computer and a printhead drivable by the computer for imprinting indicium on a piece of mail, the metering device further comprising means for receiving programming instructions from a remote location via a communications system for operation of the computer, means for establishing an amount of postage to be imprinted as part of the indicium on the piece of mail, wherein the computer is operative in response to said programming instructions to cryptographically encode the indicium by use of a coding key included within said programming instructions, an encoded indicium on the piece of mail being readable by a reading device of the Postal Service for verification of authenticity of postage appearing on the piece of mail, the cryptographic encoding of the indicium being locally modifiable by a user of the secure postage metering device.

2. (Previously presented) A metering device according to claim 1, further comprising means for entering a choice of coding into the computer, said computer being constructed of a field programmable gate array (FPGA) enabling alteration of encryption circuitry of the computer by software controlling the FPGA, and wherein said FPGA is configurable with software provided securely from a remote source by the communications system.

3. (Original) A metering device according to claim 2, wherein said entering means permits manual entering of said choice of

coding in conjunction with utilization of said coding key received from said remote location.

4. (Original) A metering device according to claim 3, wherein said receiving means is operative to receive a signal from the remote location providing data as to an amount of postage authorized to be dispensed by the metering device.

5. (Original) A metering device according to claim 1, wherein said indicium includes a one-dimensional image composed of markings defining a representation of coded data.

6. (Original) A metering device according to claim 1, wherein said indicium includes a two-dimensional image composed of markings arranged in two dimensions defining a representation of coded data.

7. (Original) A metering device according to claim 6, wherein said indicium further comprises an alphanumeric character.

8. (Original) A metering device according to claim 7, wherein said alphanumeric character represents an amount of postage paid.

9. (New) A metering device according to claim 1, wherein operating software of the metering device is remotely updated by remote programs received via the communications system.

10. (New) A metering device according to claim 9, wherein the updating of the operating software effects a functional reconfiguration of metering device hardware without physical modification of the metering device.

11. (New) A method of encryption of a postage indicium of a secure postage metering device having a computer and a printhead drivable by the computer for imprinting indicium on a piece of mail, the method comprising:

receiving programming instructions, for operation of the computer, from a remote location via a bi-directional communications system;

establishing an amount of postage to be imprinted as part of the indicium on a piece of mail;

cryptographically encoding the indicium, in response to the programming instructions, by use of a coding key included within the programming instructions, wherein the encoded indicium on the piece of mail being readable by a reading device of the Postal Service for verification of authenticity of postage appearing on the piece of mail; and

locally modifying the cryptographic encoding of the indicium, wherein the modification is by a user of the secure postage metering device.

12. (New) A method according to claim 11, wherein locally modifying the cryptographic encoding of the indicium includes selecting settings of coding circuitry within the computer,

wherein a selected setting of the coding circuitry is printed as a portion of the indicium.

13. (New) A method according to claim 11, further comprising receiving a signal from the remote location providing data as to an amount of postage authorized to be dispensed by the metering device.